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A STRONGLY QUALIFIED DEMOCRACY

by Felix Morley

It is now three weeks since, on June 5, Secretary Marshall told a Harvard audience that the purpose of our foreign policy

> ". . . should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist."

The practical results of this speech, with its implied assurance of an enlarged and continuing program of American assistance to Western Europe, cannot yet be assessed. As the Secretary of State emphasized, "there must be some agreement among the countries of Europe as to the requirements of the situation and the part those countries themselves will take . . ." The governments of Great Britain and France, which have no illusions about their own desperate and deteriorating economic position, are now making every effort to establish the agreement called pre-requisite by General Marshall. And Russia has decided that it is the path of wisdom not to oppose this effort officially.

But the Harvard speech contained a note which is of even greater fundamental import than the issue of what the United States can, or cannot, do to avert the impending collapse in Western Europe. For the first time, in the two wasted years since Germany's unconditional surrender, an American policy-making official addressed himself intelligently to the problem of European reconstruction. That problem, Secretary Marshall emphasized, is primarily economic and only secondarily political.

The advance which has been made can be measured by the fact that not once in his Harvard speech did the Secretary of State mention, still less acclaim, the misleading word "democracy." He placed the emphasis where it belongs, on "political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist." Unless those conditions can be established, in the fringe of Europe not yet lost to freedom, the current talk of "democracy" will continue to be as barren of desired results as it is intellectually confused.

Nevertheless, one swallow does not make a summer, and the clarity of thought in Secretary Marshall's speech at Harvard unfortunately does

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not mean that the Administration is as yet out of the fog created by Franklin Roosevelt's demagogic leadership.

II

Just two days before vetoing the tax-reduction bill, President Truman publicly regretted that the Communist governments of Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria "have disregarded the will of the majority." Although never elected President, Mr. Truman seemingly saw no inconsistency in following that statement with two applications of the veto power calculated to block the majority will of his own people. One veto succeeded; the second, Congress could not stomach.

Nobody claims that President Truman violated the Constitution in vetoing legislation which had received the support of a large majority of the duly-elected representatives in both House and Senate. There was, prior to the New Deal, a healthy tradition that the President should automatically approve all revenue legislation as passed by Congress. But this democratic custom was always as subject to overthrow as the one which long maintained that no individual should be entrusted with more than two terms of Presidential office.

The point is not the propriety of these undemocratic vetoes but the fact that majority rule can be thus challenged under our system of government. And it is this fact which makes Mr. Truman's coincident attack on Communist procedures, for disregarding "the will of the majority," so painfully inept.

If the word "democracy" means anything at all, as a definition of a system of government, it means exactly what the President implied in his attack on the Soviet satellites. Democracy, by literal translation of its Greek roots, is government by the people. Since it is obviously impossible for all the people to govern, the word is reasonably applied to a representative system in which the law-makers are elected by the free choice of the citizenry, and in which the law is determined by a simple majority of the chosen representatives.

For the attainment of a democratic system of government both free election of representatives and majority rule by those representatives are obviously necessary. It should not be necessary to emphasize that democracy is only partially attained when majority rule is restricted, as well as when elections are corrupt. But Americans are today so unschooled in the very elements of political philosophy that, in re-establishing definitions, nothing can be taken for granted.

Confusion as to the meaning of democracy reached an all-time high in Mr. Truman's ill-conceived broadcast denouncing the Taft-Hartley bill. The legislation, he asserted, "would threaten fundamental

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democratic freedoms." If there is such a thing as a "fundamental democratic freedom" it is the freedom of the will of the majority to prevail, which is precisely what the President was doing his utmost to deny. Mr. Truman, like Stalin and Hitler, confuses democracy with what he himself thinks should be done. Such muddled thinking in high places is truly dangerous.

III

The newspaper headlines of the past few days should have sufficed to demonstrate that democracy in our system of government is so qualified as to make application of the term to this Republic highly inaccurate.

Recent events have focused public attention on the undemocratic nature of the Presidential veto power. Democracy was certainly severely qualified when a vote of 268 to 137, as given in the House on June 17 against the tax-reduction veto, nevertheless failed to override the Executive will. Yet there is no discernible public demand that the veto power be eliminated.

The limitation on democracy, in the American system of government, is even more pronounced in the composition of the Senate. There a spokesman from Nevada, representing approximately 125,000 people, has exactly the same voting power as one from New York State, with some 14,000,000 inhabitants. To achieve the democratic ideal, to which we pay so much idle lip service, New York should be given 112 Senators if Nevada keeps two, and the Senate representation of all other states should also be increased in proportion to population. There is no popular agitation for any such reform.

The Senate, moreover, is not the most striking instance of the undemocratic nature of American governmental institutions. The Supreme Court, or rather a majority of one among its nine appointed Justices, has power in effect to nullify legislation, even if passed unanimously by both Houses of Congress. If the Greeks had a name for this arrangement it was certainly not democracy.

Finally, among the many available illustrations of the undemocratic nature of American government may be cited the First Amendment of the original Constitution. What the Declaration of Independence calls "Unalienable Rights" are by this Amendment, and by the rest of the Bill of Rights, placed wholly outside of the control of the electorate and of Congress as its representative agency:

> "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

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Students of government of course realize why this Republic, though socially democratic, was given a Constitution which makes it impossible correctly to define the United States as a political democracy.

The founders of the Republic, as their abundant writings testify, were determined "to secure the blessings of liberty" and to safeguard the individual from tyranny of every kind. They knew their history well enough to realize that the most terrible tyrannies are those in which the majority of people acquiesce. And they knew their philosophy well enough to appreciate the cogency of Plato's reasoning, in the Eighth Book of the Republic, as to the certainty that unrestricted democracy will degenerate into tyranny.

Therefore, at the Convention in Philadelphia 160 years ago this summer, a system of government designed primarily to protect minorities from coercion, including the coercion of the State itself, was skillfully worked out. It is the only government ever devised which fulfills the ideal set down by John Stuart Mill in the essay On Liberty:

> "If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind."

Department of State officials since the end of the war have continuously advocated the world-wide development of political democracy, though the government they serve has no such goal itself. Simultaneously there has been a virtual conspiracy of silence in regard to the importance of protecting minority rights, which our government was planned to sustain, so long as they do not become monopolistic.

Much of the abysmal failure of our post-war policy can be traced to this confusion of thought among officials who might reasonably be expected to understand the deeply-reasoned political philosophy of the nation whose diplomacy they are entrusted to conduct. Obviously the Russians can claim that they too believe in democracy, with qualifications somewhat different from those which we apply. But no Soviet official would venture to assert that his government believes in the protection of minority rights, excepting only those of Communists.

The most significant part of the vitally important pronouncement made by Secretary Marshall at Harvard has been overlooked. It is found in his wise decision to abandon the State Department's misleading advocacy of political democracy, and to substitute a clear-cut, practical objective which really means something: -- the development of "political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist."

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events VOL. IV, NO. 26

By Frank C. Hanighen June 25, 1947

With his vetoes of the tax and labor bills, Truman has gone unabashedly "political." It will be objected that he has acted politically right along, and this is no new development. Be that as it may, for six months there has prevailed a conception of Truman as a sincere middle-of-the-roader, an independent free from obligations to special groups, a man who rose above political considerations. This picture, true or false, has been badly, perhaps irreparably, damaged. Most politicians, of course, normally try to avoid the indictment of "playing politics." But in the past six months the effort to do so has been especially marked both in the White House and on the Hill. Today, it is not Congress that is so labelled.

Even Truman's new role of "friend of Labor" is believed to be adulterated. Some Labor circles, and a number of impartial observers claim that after he signed the veto, he really did not take energetic measures to prevent passage over his veto; that he only went through the motions. The much publicized luncheon with a dozen Members of Congress who had voted for the bill is regarded humorously in Washington. "One does not put pressure on Congressmen in a goldfish bowl," it is said. Indeed, as everyone knows, pressure is applied in private negotiations involving such matters as patronage. While Truman showed some signs of playing this game several weeks ago, there were absolutely no such indications in the last days.

Truman, it is claimed, wanted the bill to pass because he felt it would prove such an unpopular failure that he could later blame Congress. But, to gain credit with Labor, he had to veto it. Perhaps, pressure or not, it would have been passed over his veto. In any case, however, the withholding of pressure assured the accomplishment of his objective. No wonder that observers on the Hill repeated a remark attributed to one of the Democratic floor leaders, "The President doesn't really care whether it passes."

Roosevelt is believed to have used the same maneuver in the case of the anti-strike bill of 1943. In July of that year, he vetoed the bill, bidding for Labor popularity. But the bill passed over his veto despite an obviously strong Labor bloc. The Senate Democratic whips, it seemed, were unaccountably lax in rounding up the faithful. And in the House Mr. Roosevelt's leader called up the bill for a vote just when most of the Labor bloc members -- it was late Friday -- had gone home to New York and Philadelphia. The delegations from those cities were largely pro-Labor and usually visited their constituencies weekends -- a fact of which the Democratic floor leader was well aware. Roosevelt, it is thought, wanted Labor's approval for his veto, but also wanted the powers of an anti-strike bill to use against John L. Lewis. Roosevelt was a past master of such tricks. Apparently, Truman has been an apt pupil.

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A little cloud has appeared to cast its shadow on the hitherto bright and shining situation of the Republican Party in what has been considered its special preserve -- the rural North. The development is connected with the problem of taxation of co-operatives. Various commercial interests have been beating a big drum in favor of taxation of the "co-ops." Speeches along these lines have been made with increasing frequency in recent months in small cities and towns, to Chambers of Commerce and luncheon clubs. Resentment against these utterances has been noted among farmers. Some of the latter, possibly exaggerating the importance of the "tax co-ops" drive, have drawn the unwarranted conclusion that in this matter the GOP is being influenced by "the big interests and Wall Street."

If the situation should grow intense and find expression in a political way, some farmers who are normally Republican voters may shift to the Democratic column and others may simply stay away from the polls on election day. In some states,

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where the farmer vote is counted on by the GOP to counter the Democratic urban vote, such results could be serious for the Republicans. Efforts are being made to stifle this prairie fire both by farm personalities and by figures in the industrial field. Meanwhile, the news that Congress may hold hearings this session on taxation of co-operatives suggests early fireworks.

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Warnings about the cost of our military establishment are being prominently voiced. General Marshall on June 20 told the members of the graduating class of the National War College that they must watch expenses more closely as they seek to build up national defense. He noted that military leaders usually protest when Congress slashes their budgets, but "we erred with dogmatic requirement. It is useless to say that political leaders fail unless we assure the public we did our best with keeping down the cost." He said that the War Department General Staff never had put sufficient effort into preparing staff studies on the budget.

In another quarter, the New York Times letter column (June 22), appeared a protest from Major Hoffman Nickerson, well-known writer on military affairs, author of the Armed Horde, Can We Limit War? etc. Major Nickerson severely criticized the Universal Military Training plan, now widely publicized, on the score that it is extravagant and that mass armies are not in accord with our strategic requirements. He also waxed satirical about the "spending" attitude of proponents of UMT, one of whom said that if Congress adopts UMT then it will be "more likely to show wisdom in regard to other features of national defense."

To this Major Nickerson retorts: "Here is the United States with its resources, which, although great, are not limitless. The more you spend on one military instrument, the less you can spend for others, and yet we are told that if Congress lavishly pours out money for universal training it will be 'more likely' to pour out still more money for the other features of national defense! Here is the Maynard Keynes-New Deal argument that 'the more you spend, the more you have' in flawless perfection."

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The dropping of the atomic bomb was wholly unnecessary to end the war with Japan -- such is the obvious conclusion to be drawn from an article by Brigadier General Bonner Fellers (Rtd.), former military secretary to General MacArthur, in the July Foreign Service, organ of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. This conclusion contradicts the thesis of ex-Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson, who in the January Harpers claimed that the holocausts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were military actions essential to the termination of the conflict.

General Fellers recalls that Emperor Hirohito forced the Japanese Government to seek peace, via Russia, in February, 1945; and tells how the Russians stalled negotiations by demanding an extortionate price for their mediation with the other Allies. "All these steps, except the original negotiations with Melik [Russian Ambassador] were known to the American Government at the time they were taking place," (our underscore), says General Fellers. Finally, in May, the Emperor appointed the pacifist Suzuki to the premiership, thinking that the Western Allies would surely interpret this as a clear sign that Japan wanted peace.

This was, says General Fellers, so interpreted by former President Hoover who told "the highest circles in Washington . . . that Suzuki's selection as Premier was an obvious white flag and offered the opportunity to make a quick peace without Russian complications as they were not at war with Japan." Fellers adds, "I do not know what steps the United States took to exploit this favorable opportunity from May to July -- before the atomic bombs were dropped -- when it was known that the Emperor was already seeking peace."

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The above is authoritative evidence, important to the clarification of the picture. Other unconfirmed private reports would benefit by similar authority, but as they come from reliable sources are worth mentioning. For instance, it is claimed that the U. S. Government, before Roosevelt went to Yalta, was fully informed by MacArthur's GHQ that the war with Japan was approaching its close and that our forces were able to end the war without Russian assistance. Also, it is asserted that General Eisenhower sent a message to Roosevelt at Yalta, assuring him that the war in the West was near its end and that the Allied forces were in a position to occupy all of Germany, even if Russia advanced no farther westward.

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An experienced foreign correspondent, who had just completed a swing around South America, last week gave us the following birds-eye view:

Argentina. Peron has no ambition to create an Argentine empire because he knows it would be impossible. He is attempting, by loans and economic agreements, to develop Buenos Aires as the great center of trade and finance in the southern part of South America. Meanwhile, his opponents try to undermine his power in its most essential area, the Labor organization, in which incidentally Senora Peron has the guiding hand. When asked about his attempts to muzzle the press, Peron replied, "We have a free press. Look at what the papers say about my wife."

Brazil. Most Brazilians would like to imprison the Communist leader, Senator Prestes. But to do so, they would have to withdraw his constitutional right of parliamentary immunity. Even the most bitter anti-Communists in parliament demur at such a step. They say, "We were governed without a constitution for too long. Now we would rather permit this fifth-columnist to remain at liberty than to endanger our hard-won liberties by establishing such a precedent."

Chile. Recently at a press conference, a reporter from New York asked a Government minister how strong was the Communist control of Chilean Labor unions. The minister retorted: "How strong is Communist control in the CIO?"

Peru. Haya de la Torre, old Leftist leader, is the brains of the ruling party. He wants to run Peru on planned collectivist lines. His offer to let representatives of foreign capital sit in the Government (see NMG, April 2) was just a sop to attract foreign loans; capital would have little voice in decisions. However, de la Torre is now strongly anti-Communist and anti-Russian.

Colombia. The country today has a Conservative government, as a result of last year's split in the Liberal Party. But the Conservatives have an uneasy seat. For Gaitan, the most prominent of the Liberals, has taken over control of the Liberal Party, and Gaitan is a collectivist. The future of Colombia is not as promising as it looked last year after the elections.

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Shortly before the Marshall speech at Harvard, a well known European Labor leader wrote: "We must try at least to bring about an improvement in morale in the Western Zones before the next winter begins. As far as I can see, the Hoover proposals are the only positive aspect of an otherwise very hopeless situation. I managed to read the full text of the Hoover plan only after I had made my own observations on a trip from Munich to Bremen. I was surprised to see how thoroughly Mr. Hoover and his collaborators understood the very essence of the problem. Unfortunately, the British Labor ministers are, almost without exception, much less well informed and British policy towards Germany has so far contributed nothing that could equal the Hoover report."

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Book Events

With this number, we initiate a section devoted to the consideration of significant books. Mr. J. M. Lalley, the author of the following, conducts a weekly book column in the Washington Post and contributes reviews to the New Yorker.

Lord Acton in his lifetime never published a book, and his great project for writing universal history as the history of freedom got no farther than the two famous essays now known to every student of political science. The lectures, reviews and correspondence collected after his death fill a few fair-sized volumes; but of these might be said what he once said himself about the writings of Burke: that whole systems of thought had been built "from the fragments that fell from his table." Until very recently the nearest thing in English to a biographical study of Acton was Cardinal Gasquet's memoir, Lord Acton and His Circle.

But a highly qualified biographer has at last appeared in Dr. David Mathew, whose first volume called Acton: The Formative Years, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 10s, 6d.) has already made its appearance. The principle that Acton gave to his students for the writing of history was that it should deal with all causes and all personages so sternly and impartially that it would be impossible for the reader to surmise from the text the religious or party persuasion of the historian. Certainly it would be difficult for any reader to infer from these first five chapters of Dr. Mathew's work that he is the Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster, and therefore like Acton himself a Roman Catholic; but of course a more difficult test of his urbane detachment will come in the subsequent volume where the bishop must deal with Acton's part in the great fight to prevent the definition of Papal Infallibility by the Vatican Council of 1870.

Bishop Mathew writes in the manner of one who wears a large learning lightly, and his prose, in contrast to the grave and massive manner of Acton, is pointed with a gentle irony. The first volume carries us to the threshold of Acton's thirtieth year, when according to his biographer, it became possible to mark in the young scholar "those accents and that matured outlook which the historian would retain." Bishop Mathew's purpose is to analyze the varied influences which had contributed to that outlook. There was first of all Acton's strangely cosmopolitan heritage; he was born at Naples where his grandfather, Sir John Acton, had been Prime Minister to the Bourbon king, and he had relatives among the political classes of France, Germany and Rome. At the age of three he succeeded to a baronetcy in Shropshire, and by the advice of his uncle, Cardinal Acton, was taken to England and sent to school at Oscott. There he came briefly but powerfully under the influence of Bishop (afterwards Cardinal) Wiseman. When he was six his mother married Lord Leveson who became Earl Granville, and the rustic social milieu of the Old Catholic Tories was suddenly exchanged for that of the sophisticated Whigs. But the most permanent and strongest personal influences were those of the learned priest Ignaz von Dollinger, with whom Acton studied at Munich, and the great parliamentarian Gladstone, whose intimate he became and who impressed him more by his failures than by his triumphs. Among practical influences were his diplomatic experience in Moscow and his six years' service in the House of Commons. Meanwhile, he had begun to assemble his vast and famous library; but the greatest of the many literary influences on his thought were his elder contemporary Tocqueville and of course Edmund Burke.

Acton's political doctrine -- the validity of which is even more apparent to our age than to his own -- was already formulated. It is, in essence, that liberty is the highest good and arbitrary power the greatest evil, so virulent in its effects that no man however strong or good, nor any class no matter how well endowed, nor any popular majority, may be safely trusted with it. -- J. M. Lalley

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